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ABSTRACT

During the spring semester of 1991, a survey was taken of a random sample of teachers and principals in the Texas public schools to discover what their perceptions were in regard to 20 selected problems that have an effect on classroom instruction. Participants were asked to check whether they felt that each problem was negligible, moderate, serious, or critical. (Serious and critical were collapsed into "serious" before data analysis on returned questionnaires.) A total of 413 teachers (48 percent) and 219 principals (47 percent) returned the instrument. Data analysis revealed that teachers and principals tended to identify many of the same items as serious. Both felt that the most serious problems were associated with student characteristics and teacher pressure and that problems related to curriculum and instructional material were of less concern. More teachers than principals were concerned about the large number of students placed in "normal classrooms" with a wide range of abilities. Both teachers and principals found the rapid rate of curriculum and instructional change a serious problem. Among the conclusions were: both groups agreed on which problems were the most serious, but differed on the degree of seriousness; teachers and principals were in closer agreement on problems that were basically external or subject to less control. The data are presented in a table specifying the problems, rank order, and percent according to opinions of teachers and principals. (AMH)

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PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS WITH REGARD TO INSTRUCTIONAL PROBLEMS IN THE CLASSROOM

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PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS WITH REGARD TO INSTRUCTIONAL PROBLEMS IN THE CLASSROOM

During the spring semester of 1991 a random sample of teachers and principals in the public schools of Texas were surveyed to discover what their perceptions were in regard to selected problems that have an effect on classroom instruction. A list of twenty instructional problems were selected for the instrument. Participants were asked to respond to the problems by checking whether they felt that each was negligible, moderate, serious, or critical. Before analyzing the data, the responses of serious and critical were combined into a single category identified as "serious." A total of 413 teachers (48%) and 219 principals (47%) returned the instrument.

The rank order of the problems according to both teachers and principals are presented in the following table which indicates the percentage of teachers and principals who perceived each problem to be serious. An analysis of these data reveal some very interesting comparisons between teachers and principals regarding their perceptions of the selected instructional problems. First, teachers and principals tended to identify many of the same items as serious. In fact, the first seven were identified as serious by over fifty percent of both teachers and principals although their rankings varied slightly.

INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS OF TEACHERS:
PROBLEMS REPORTED SERIOUS BY TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

Problems	Teachers (N=413)		Principals (N=219)	
	Rank Order	Percent	Rank Order	Percent
The values and attitudes of the current generations make teaching difficult.	(1)	78	(1)	64
Students are not conscientious about completing classwork and homework assignments.	(2)	72	(3)	60
Teachers feel under pressure too much of the time.	(3)	71	(5)	58
Too many students are indifferent to school.	(4)	68	(7)	51
Teachers feel that parents are not supportive when students have problems in school.	(5)*	64	(4)	59
Too many students are reading below their grade level.	(5)*	64	(6)	56
Teachers feel frustrated by the rapid rate of curriculum and instructional change.	(7)	57	(2)	61
There are too many students who cause discipline problems for teachers.	(8)	54	(11)	29
Too many students in the "normal classroom" have learning problems.	(9)	51	(9)	35
The variance in ability levels of students within classes or groups is too great.	(10)*	50	(8)	37
Teachers feel frustrated by the routine and inflexibility of their situation.	(10)*	50	(12)	26
Teachers have to work with too many students to be effective.	(12)	49	(16)	18
Too many students are chronically tardy or absent.	(13)*	48	(10)	33
Teachers feel inhibited by lack of authority in decision making.	(13)*	48	(17)	17

INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS OF TEACHERS: PROBLEMS REPORTED SERIOUS BY TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS CONTINUED

Problems	Teachers (N=413)		Principals (N=219)	
	Rank Order	Percent	Rank Order	Percent
Teachers are not given the support that they desire from the school administration.	(15)	39	(20)	9
Teachers feel threatened by some students who are discipline problems.	(16)	37	(13)	22
Teachers feel frustrated by the lack of help from resource and support personnel of the school.	(17)	35	(14)	20
The required curriculum is not appropriate for the students.	(18)	27	(15)	19
Teachers have to assign too much "busy work" in order to maintain classroom discipline.	(19)	23	(18)	12
Teachers are restricted by the "quality of" or "lack of" instructional materials.	(20)	24	(19)	10

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Further examination of the table indicates that both teachers and principals felt that the most serious problems were associated with student characteristics and teacher pressure. They also tended to agree that areas of less concern were those related to curriculum and instructional material. It is interesting to note that many more teachers than principals were concerned about the large number of students placed in "normal classrooms" with wide variables in ability. This of course is a requirement of HB94-142 and must be implemented in all public schools.

Another major phenomenon was that while teachers tended to agree on which areas constitute serious problems, they differed greatly in the percent of the respective groups that perceived the problems as serious. Obviously more teachers than principals felt strongly about these instructional problems with the exception of the problem of teachers feeling frustrated by the rapid rate of curriculum and instructional change. Sixty-one percent of the principals indicated that this was a serious problem which gave it a number two ranking while fifty-seven percent of the teachers indicated that it was serious for a number seven ranking.

It may be concluded that:

1. Classroom teachers and principals tended to be in agreement about those problems which constitute the most serious problems for teachers, but they differed considerably in the degree of seriousness. This may be due to the fact that principals are farther removed from the problems.

2. Classroom teachers and principals were in closer agreement on problems which were basically external or subject to less control, but tended to differ more in their degree of perception in regard to problems associated with school organization and administration.

3. Most of the problems identified as serious by teachers and principals are ones that students bring with them from home and society, however, several are problems that stem from school organization and administration which can be remedied more easily.

4. Several of the teachers' concerns were institutional in nature rather than instructional. This may imply that teachers are more concerned about the conditions under which their professional services are performed than with the mechanics of that performance.

In any survey of instructional problems and needs as perceived by both teachers and principals, it would be expected that a larger percentage of teachers would designate virtually all items included as serious. What is most revealing in this survey is that both teachers and principals were in agreement in overall ranking. It would also appear most significant that teachers tended to agree with their principals that curricular requirements, quality of instructional materials, and school-wide discipline procedures were not perceived as being of major seriousness.

The public school professionals who have responded to this survey have indicated clearly that the most serious instructional problems which they confront are parental apathy and a consequent lack of student motivation to learn.